

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH

JUNE 18, 2007

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OMBUDSMAN

Often times, County residents approach the Board of Supervisors with complaints about the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), which should have been raised during Dependency Court hearings, and which may have influenced the Court's decision in a particular case. Although the Board of Supervisors does hold DCFS accountable for failure to appropriately apply child welfare laws in case management, the Board does not intervene in DCFS' recommendations to Dependency Court; does not direct DCFS to make particular decisions in any individual case; and can not change court orders or direct Dependency Court in any way. Yet the need remains to ensure greater accountability to County residents who appeal to the Board with complaints about child abuse and neglect cases.

In August 2002, the Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a motion that directed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to examine a new mechanism to achieve an objective review of citizen complaints concerning the County's handling of child abuse and neglect cases. This included the possibility of restructuring the existing Children's Group Home Ombudsman's Office, which is located within the Office of the Auditor-Controller and takes complaints from youth in group

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homes. The restructured Ombudsman's Office was to include at least one Ombudsman in each District or Service Planning Area who would review these matters and respond to families in a timely, respectful and unbiased manner.

In 2002, DCFS created a centralized Office of the Ombudsman utilizing existing DCFS personnel . In 2005, DCFS redirected those personnel to performing other duties within the department. As of today, the County does not have an Office of the Children's Services Ombudsman that is administratively separated from staff providing services to families to review citizen complaints and make recommendations for legislative or systemic change, specifically separating out and collaborating with Dependency Court on improving those circumstances impacted by the quality of legal representation.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Administrative Officer, in consultation with County Counsel, to report back in 30 days on the feasibility of establishing an independent Office of the Children's Services Ombudsman with a clear chain of command utilizing existing qualified staff within the Departments of Children and Family Services and Auditor-Controller.

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